Title: If You Were in My Sneakers: Migration Stories in the Studio Photography of Dakar based Omar Victor Diop

Running Header: Migration Stories in the Photography of Omar Victor Diop

Author: Beth Buggenhagen

Affiliation: Indiana University

Keywords: Photography, Migration, Senegal

Abstract

If one of the defining images of the present is the unregulated migration of individuals and families across the Mediterranean in small boats, what does migration look like from the perspective on those based on the African continent? In this essay, I argue that Dakar-based photographer Omar Victor Diop focuses his lens on the dignity of migrants, rather than the crisis of migration. In *Project Diaspora: Self-Portraits 2014,* he reframes contemporary migration in a global historical context to show the contradictions of these movements across oceanic spaces. In *Diaspora*, Diop swaps out props for football paraphernalia to point to contradictions: so-called migration success stories are rife with experiences of racism and exclusion and important black historical figures can be omitted from historical accounts.

Biography

Beth Buggenhagen is an Associate Professor of Communication, Media and Performance (CaMP) in the Department of Anthropology and a faculty member in the African Studies Program at Indiana University, Bloomington. She has been working in Senegal since 1992, focusing on the global circuits of Senegalese Muslims, material and visual culture, and gender.

People walk everywhere, but never toward the same horizon.

Fatou Diome, *The Belly of the Atlantic*

Introduction

Anne-Louis Girodet's painting, *Portrait of Citizen Jean-Baptiste Belley,* portrays a former Senegalese slave as a symbol of the French Republic's achievement of human rights. Although Belley bought his freedom and fought for abolition, he died in a French jail. Now consider a digital reenactment of this painting by Dakar-based photographer Omar Victor Diop in his series *Project Diaspora, Self-Portraits 2014* (Figure 1). Whereas Girodet portrays the figure resting his back on a bust of an eighteenth-century abolitionist, Diop poses as the sitter leaning on a football (soccer ball). In *Diaspora*, Diop captures the contradictions of migration by reenacting a series of historical portraits of men of African descent who lived in Europe, the Americas, and South Asia who had in common their mobility and their capacity for social ascendancy, though many of these figures remain largely unknown today. Diop uses football props in the *Diaspora* series, such as a red card, boots (cleats), and goalie gloves, to unsettle the viewing experience, causing the viewer to stop and think: Why are these men holding sports equipment, and what story do these props tell about their sitters?

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

If one of the defining images of the present is the unregulated migration of individuals and families across the Mediterranean in small boats, what does migration look like from the perspective on those based on the African continent? In response to photojournalists and other documentary photographers[1] capturing images to fit the story of migration as a contemporary *crisis,*[2] Diop says, "there is no room for dignity in the way migrations are documented…every photographer just needs to go to a border and snatch a picture of people hiking, drowning or

jumping a fence. Is this the only documentation that will be left from this time in history in one hundred years? It is not even ten percent of the whole situation."[3] In this essay, I argue that the Dakar-based photographer Omar Victor Diop focuses his lens on the dignity of migrants, not the crisis of migration, as the singular message of his series; he does so even though some of these journeys were fraught with contradictions, such as Belly's ultimate jailing. Diop reframes African migration in a global historical context making connections across time periods to show similarities in migrant trajectories in the past and present in his *Diaspora* series. Diop asks: what has motivated African oceanic crossings over the centuries? And, why have these journeys, often well documented in family, national, and colonial archives and Western art, been forgotten? Not only have the great figures of African descent that once crossed oceans been forgotten, Diop claims, so too have been the lives lost crossing the Atlantic in the past decade or more that are too numerous to count. His images drive this story that unfolds over the long durée.[4] To turn these stories of past migration into contemporary accounts Diop uses footballs and other sports props that seem anachronistic and catch the viewer's eye. As Fatou Diome so vividly captures in her novel, *The Belly of the Atlantic*, "better than the terrestrial globe, this round ball enables our underdeveloped countries to catch the west's fleeting gaze, which usually dwells on the wars, famines, and ravages of AIDS in Africa" (2006, 172).

Football represents the dream of migration held by young Senegalese athletes riveted by European football matches and keenly aware of the African players on these teams. Footballs are often one of the gifts brought home by migrants along with their tales of employment in Europe, raising expectations at home. Already one of the poorest countries in the world, Senegal ranks 166 out of 182 countries on the Human Development Index (Mbaye 2014); the effects of the global economic crisis intensified young people's efforts to migrate. As restrictions on legal

migration through quotas and border controls increased following the global financial meltdown around 2012, unregulated migration also swelled (Mbaye 2014; Mbow and Tamba 2007). The reduction of legal routes to Europe by plane means that many have taken to treacherous oceanic crossings from Senegal to Lampedusa, Sicily, Ceuta, Melilla, and the Canary Islands. In 2006 alone, half of the illegal migrants arriving in the Canary Islands were Senegalese, and of the 7,000 who died on the way, 1,000 were Senegalese (Mbaye 2014). Since 2000, at least 25,500 people from Senegal, The Gambia, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, Egypt, Eritrea, Pakistan and Syria have died trying to reach Europe (Albahari 2015, 5).

Elite athletes from the African continent are often thought to experience an upwardly mobile trajectory often associated with migration, much like the notable historical figures of African descent portrayed by Diop. Yet once they arrive in Europe and elsewhere this trajectory is often cut short by exclusionary practices and policies.[5] Diop's *Diaspora* series captures these contradictions. Although Senegalese have turned to migration, as have Atlantic Africans more generally, to manage economic volatility over the long term (Guyer 2004), young men and women pay a penalty for their mobility. In Europe migrants experience racial exclusion (Carter 2013, 211) and in Senegal they must work to reinsert themselves into a social world from which they have long been absent (Buggenhagen 2012; Hannaford 2014; Kringelbach 2016). Diop's use of football iconography in the *Diaspora* series speaks to an experience of incomplete mobility. His lens captures the dissonance between the materiality of labor and the aspirations of a global life that many migrants hold.

In Diop's photographs from the *Diaspora* series that I will discuss in this essay, footballs represent the world in motion, red cards are held up to signal a penalty on a player, and shoes emphasize running. Unlike props of an earlier era used in European portrait paintings and

photography, as well as West African studio portraiture a century later (Peffer 2013, 6), these props are not intended to index social position. Diop's use of football props point to dislocations of migrants in space and time, separated from the contexts in which certain objects of value make sense. As mentioned, I argue that Diop's singular message in the *Diaspora* series is dignity in the context of migration, which is not an upwardly mobile trajectory, but rife with contradictions. I focus on three of Diop's images from the series, *Jean-Baptiste Belley, Albert Badin,* and *Ikhlas Khan*, and their props, a football, a red card, and a sneaker to make this argument. Shoes were commonly shown in West African studio portraiture because they indexed the well-being of the sitter. Shoes are what Levi R. Bryant calls "bright objects" (2014, 202); they exercise tremendous gravity and create paths along which other entities move in space and time. A shoe, like any bright object, as Bryant argues, has the capacity to become a "rogue object" in another assemblage:

> *Rogue objects* are not chained to any given assemblage of objects, but instead wander in and out of assemblages, modifying relations within the assemblages into which they enter. . . . [R]ogue objects reconfigure gravitational relations. . . . [O]bjects produce effects on other objects. (Bryant 2014, 209)

In Diop's *Diaspora*, football paraphernalia like shoes become rogue objects. Rather than representing well being achieved through migration, these props represent dignity lost at the boarder where migrants' humanity is denied by exclusionary practices and policies of their countries of destination.

Getting a Foot in the Door

In 2011, Diop broke into the biennial circuits with his portrait series *Le future du beau*, shown at Bamako Biennial of African Photography. Prior to that time, he had experimented with

landscape photography while employed in corporate communications by Ernst and Young, followed by British American Tobacco in Kenya and Nigeria, executing corporate strategies and developing messages for a variety of purposes inside and outside the corporation. When I asked Diop about his training he responded, "Yeah, I do not have a fine arts training. The thing is I have always looked at photography and always felt quite sad that I had never been to an art school." He continued, "I come from a very corporate family. My father is a charter accountant, my mother is a lawyer. . . . And art. . . ." He then paused and fell into laughter. Diop emphasizes his outsider status to the global art world to increase his visibility. He plays into western romanticization of African artists as self-taught, going back to the curator Andre Magnin's groundbreaking 1989 exhibition of contemporary African art, *Magiciennes de la terre*. Mainstream press coverage from *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *CNN* often characterizes Diop as a corporate-figure-turned-artist, a figure who "gave up a lucrative career to pursue his passion."[6]

While most African artists are based in Europe, the few based on the African continent struggle to hook into biennial circuits and the international art world. Diop's corporate preparation facilitated his access to and navigation of these global art spaces (Grabski 2015). Through his professional experience Diop learned the art of developing a strategy, a message, and marketing, all of which are essential to his success as a global artist based in Dakar. As much as one can draw parallels between how Dakar-based artists navigate localized market logics and global markets, one can also argue that Diop's "market logic" (Grabski 2011) emerges from his corporate experience. After all, the capitalist underpinnings of the art system perpetuate the inequalities of the western art system, such as its notions of taste and its financial apparatus (Sanyal 2015). Thus, the artists who speak the language of the neoliberal art system, regardless

of where they are based, can experience meteoric success (Nzewi 2015, 11). Diop navigates the structural inequalities of the global art system through his approach to audience; he plays to the market as much as he plays to an art audience. Diop's rapid career trajectory stems from his understanding of the links between the marketing of branded goods, the creation of art, and the valuation of art by the market.[7]

Diop continues to work in the world of advertising, a world that until very recently was dominated by French multinational firms who flew in their own photographers and rarely responded to a local visual aesthetic. Diop remarked, "[I]in the 90s and in the 2000s they were all French, and they were all quite older. These would be photographers who never make it anywhere else, and they would come here because they had equipment."[8] In Dakar, Diop works for the multinational company, McCann Dakar, and for fashion lines Bantu Wax and Adama Paris*,* among others. In Paris, he recently shot for the French fashion house Lanvin and successfully demanded the inclusions of models of African descent. By September 2013, Diop said he had 70% of the advertising market in Dakar; "I would drive and all of the street would have both Tigo and Orange or at the airport and you land and you see your picture and you are like, oh, I shot that" (Figure 2).[9]

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Diop draws on his advertising background to drive home his message about dignity. As William Mazzarella (2009, 299) has argued with regard to advertising, "any social project that is not imposed through force alone must be affective in order to be effective." In a similar manner, football fuels passions across Senegal and using football equipment as props invites people to reconsider what they know about history. Diop's own rediscovery of that history is the context and the motivation for his work.

Diop's choice of subject matter, migration, stems from his travels in Europe, but also his home base in Senegal's capital, Dakar. Here migration is inscribed on the urban landscape. The booming construction economy financed by the cash remittances of overseas migrants stands in stark contrast to the casualization of work through ever increasing forms of informality and extemporization, improvisational housing arrangements and the like, all characteristics of global capital (Comaroff 2011; Mbembe 2012). These social processes lead young women and men to look elsewhere, outside of Senegal, to build a life. The visual landscape of the Dakar coastline alone, with its building rubble, piles of sand siphoned from eroding beaches to create cement blocks, and rows of rebar in every neighborhood raise the question—are these objects indicative of buildings midpoint in construction, or are they the ruins of buildings in various points of dilapidation? And do these buildings stand for social projects in progress or abandoned by migrants abroad ever eager to return home but often not able due to their unregulated status abroad? These are the questions also raised by the Paris-based visual artist, Mame-Diarra Niang who calls this "the new face of Dakar….forged from the ubiquitous sand that creeps into every crevice of this coastal city and the concrete formed from it" (Niang 2014).

Project Diaspora: Self-Portraits 2014

Diaspora consists of seventeen, large scale, high resolution, and archival quality digital pigment inkjet prints. Diop gives each of the images the name of the historical figure depicted in the portrait; this naming is a political act that gives attribution to important historical figures, such as Jean-Baptiste Belley. In *Diaspora*, Diop mines the archive of Western art history, the colonial archive, and his own family's collection of portrait albums, including many images taken by the Senegalese portraitist Mama Casset, that characterize portraiture practice in West Africa to reclaim the visual past and to re-envision the social and political worlds in which he

creates. As de Jong and Harney argue, "the archive is what enables us to address our present" (2015, 4). When Diop expresses his thoughts and feelings about these archives, his "talk of affect…roots embodied experiences in deeper histories, while gesturing toward what these descriptions cannot grasp" (Rutherford 2016, 289). Diop thus turns to the visual and, like in the work of many contemporary artists including Samuel Fosso's *African Spirits, 2008* (Njami 2010), Nomusa Makhumu's "re-enactment" in *Self Portraits*,[10] Santu Mofokeng's "counter archive," *The Black Photo Album* (Mofokeng 2013),[11] he reimagines, reawakens, and reclaims the visual past through the "regenerative possibilities" of his archives (de Jong and Harney 2015, 1) in order to create a counter archive (Buckley 2005).

Diop created this series during an artists' residency in Malaga, Spain, in 2014 where the lack of attention, space, and teaching of images of Africans in western art institutions struck him as problematic. Referring to Jean-Baptiste Belley, Diop says, "even his portrait is at the national museum of Versailles, which is one of the greatest museums in France and no one knows about it, no one knows about him in Senegal, and no one knows about him in France either."[12] Reframing is a common form of artistic practice, involving others such as the conceptual artist Fred Wilson's "Mining the Museum," the figurative painter Wayne Manns' depiction of the black experience, and Kehinde Wiley's portrait paintings which address the absence of the black experience in the museum. Diop is most often compared to Wiley, a portrait painter who "engages the signs and visual rhetoric of the heroic, powerful, majestic and the sublime in his representation of urban, black and brown men found throughout the world."[13] In fact, Wiley and Diop have met; Wiley spent time in Dakar for his *The World's Stage* series, which includes portraits of men in Dakar. Diop says of *Diaspora*, "I wanted to show them in a conquering

posture while underlining the similarity of challenges faced by African diasporas at different periods," (Diop quoted in Dedieu 2014).

Diop's work presents an opportunity for social critics and scholars to reconsider the "problematic archive" of colonial images of Africa.[14] The camera conquered and divided colonial subjects through the "postcard mania" of the early 1900s (Geary 1998), plates in scholarly editions, anthropological and natural history photography, and colonial exhibitions set up clear distinctions between Europeans as photographers, African women and men as subjects, and Europeans as audience (Alloula 1986; Faris 1996; Landau and Kaspin 2002; Pinney 1992; Pinney and Peterson 2003; Poole 2005; Ryan 1997). Scholars have criticized the "anesthetization of images that objectify or instrumentalize human beings" (Amkpa et al.,14). Yet, because images lend themselves to myriad and often competing interpretations, photographs splintered the colonial frame and thus provide a point of intervention for contemporary artists. Photographic objects and practices in the colonial period led to a "blurring and instability of categories" (Edwards 2013, 49). For example, colonial mug shots of Muslim shaykhs suspected of fomenting revolution became devotional objects for their adepts (Roberts et al. 2003). Colonial era images that were revealed to be staged collaborations disclosed the fraught nature of colonial power such as those of the French colonial photographer Jean Audema in the French Congo (MacDougall 2006, 204) and demonstrated that both narratives of science and fiction were at play.

Diop also draws on conventions of portrait photography that emerged on the eve of independence in 1959-60 that released African women and men from these "marvelous fictions that legitimated colonialism, racism and sexism."[15] In African studio portraiture, clients and their photographers embraced the studio as a space of play and fantasy. If colonial-era photography

suppressed affect from the final image, West African portraitists brought it back. They used props to index their aspirations. Well-known photographers including Bamako-based Seydou Keita, Malick Sidibe, and Abderramane Sakaly (of Moroccan descent born in Senegal), as well as Dakar-based photographer Mama Casset Note, employed modernist props such as bicycles, motorcycles, telephones, and radios in their studio photography (Bigham 1999; Haney 2010; Keller 2013; Nimis 2005).[16] Among Malian photographers the studio became a space to index social values of *badenya* and *fadenya*, of cooperation and competition among siblings, co-wives, initiatory groups, youth clubs, and professional colleagues (Keller 2013). Diop described similar relations of cooperation and competition appearing in Senegalese portraiture as *doom-u-ndey* (mother's child) and *doom-u-baay* (father's child). Photographic images across independent West Africa incorporated local ways of seeing and being seen (Ouédraogo 2002). This "emancipatory power" (Bajorek 2010a, 434) of independence era studio photography contrasted with scientific aims and narratives of colonial era photography that presented subjects as specimens and types (Rabine 2010, 314). Moreover, Keita and Sidibe [and Casset], in contrast to other commercial photographers of their era, were master archivists, a key criterion for global recognition early on.[17] They retained the material means necessary to sustain exhibition, study, and interaction with their work over time (see also Gore 2015, 5). Significantly, this act of archiving not only enabled the exhibition of their work on the world stage but also made it possible for successive artists like Diop to build on the practices and conventions of their portrait photography.

By the time Diop first picked up his camera in the early 2000s, studio based photography was winding down. The introduction of color photography, rapid photo processing, and eventually digital cameras, opened the door to many amateur photographers leading to stiff

competition for professional studio photographers, so that photographic work became more informal. In response to these shifts, many portrait photographers went into advertising, though possibilities in Senegal were limited by the French domination of the market, into design and the arts, and into photojournalism, none of which were considered mutually exclusive fields. Similar movements were afoot across the continent. In South Africa for example, photographers associated with the photography collective and photo agency known as Afrapix continued their own projects, which often carried complex personal themes and allowed for critical self-reflection, alongside their photojournalism and anti-apartheid work.[18] In Senegal, following the liberalization of the media, many professional photographers turned to photojournalism for The Pan African News Agency (*L'Agence Panafricaine de Presse*, PANAPRESS) based in Dakar, which seemed more politically important in its work to counter Western images of Africa in the mainstream press like Reuters and AP, and more financially lucrative.[19]

Playing Fast and Footloose with Props

While portraiture in African art is a topic of much study (Borgatti 2013), Diop is not creating African portraits; he is reenacting western portraits, and is placing himself in the western depiction of important African historical figures who migrated abroad. In the *Diaspora* series, Diop poses as the original sitter, recreates the original clothing styles, and reenacts the original sitter's pose, gesture, and expression.

Diop's self-portraits stand in contrast to Western journalistic accounts in which the migrant appears only as an object in a story. Diop's portraits invite self-reflection. Like selfies, Diop's self-portraits are a "genre of autobiography or memoir that makes the image maker into the protagonist of stories of his or her own composition" (Shipley 2015, 403). But unlike selfies, which we think of as unmediated images, portraits are mediated by the artistry of the

photographer and the proficiency of the client in posing in the studio space. In this case, Diop is both photographer and character. As much as the genres of self-portraiture and selfies permit self-construction and allow for self-reflection, these performances can slip into masquerade and impersonation. Diop places himself in the image to amuse and to provoke, much in the way Samuel Fosso's *African Spirits 2008* amuses. In *African Spirits* Fosso impersonates historical figures such as Leopold Sedar Senghor, founder of philosophical movement of Negritude and first President of Senegal (Njami 2010).

Diop's use of the portraiture convention conveys his ambivalence about the self and about himself, because a portrait is of the self and for the self, but also for the public to gaze upon, "making the self visible to the gaze of another" (Enwezor 2010). The studio provides a space to explore this ambivalence, especially regarding the experience of African migrants past and present, and the limits of social and political possibility for these travelers. When asked if his *Diaspora* series of self-portraits were also selfies, Diop responded, "I don't see these as self-portraits, the technique is self-portraiture when you have a photographer posing as himself, but for me it is like a second coming of a body of work that hasn't been seen enough and celebrations of a historical figure who is not celebrated enough, so it is really not about me."[20] The opportunity to sit in the position of the original subjects provided him with an opportunity to experience their story; an experience that he described as "feeling of a presence, or of a pilgrimage, like inviting a spirit into the studio, establishing contact with a figure who had a lot to say but the life was not long enough to say so, this means a lot more than just self-portraiture."[21] Diop's project expresses "the human tendency to posit another's thoughts and feelings and experience them as one's own" which "is what accounts for what happens when

people see movies or walk past burnt out cars and imagine becoming someone else" (Rutherford 2016, 292).

To convey this affective experience and to link past and present lives, Diop relies on the visual device of props. In general, western portrait artists used props to develop a narrative, reflect details of individual lives, and convey societal values. In eighteenth and nineteenth century European portraiture, props indexed social and political position by providing clues to a sitter's worth. For example, curtains and pillars often symbolized aristocratic origins. Props like these became conventions that conveyed qualities. When props are used in conventional ways, they can be easily read by their viewers.

Both African and European colonial portrait photographers based in Africa used props to provide continuity to social lives ruptured by transatlantic voyages for some, and the violence of colonialism for others. Heavy curtains, tables and chairs, and plants and flowers depicting domestic interiors appeared in colonial imagery to index the status and well-being of African and European families on the move and to show this to those at home. Since low levels of light made shooting indoors difficult, photographers recreated domestic interiors outside for their sitters, used backdrops painted with images of tropical foliage and often recreated interior scenes with movable furniture (Peffer 2013). Some photographers used painted backdrops depicting European architectural features like arches and columns. In addition, while many privately commissioned family portraits became part of a photographer's portfolio and were re-printed and circulated as generic postcards from the colonies in which the identity of the sitter was lost, not all images printed on postcard stock circulated as postcards. Postcard stock was less expensive and widely available for private family photographs (Bajorek 2010b, 162). In one image signed by the colonial era photographer J. Benyoumoff, we see the ever-present painted background

featuring European architectural features, domestic furnishings, and tropical foliage (Figure 3). We also see props, like an umbrella and a chair, that index the sitter's high status.[22]

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Although African and European photographers shared these conventions, they depicted their sitters differently. Some of these differences include the use of backdrops: African photographers used backdrops, whereas European photographers often did not. When subjects are foregrounded using a backdrop, the subject dictates the composition and provides power to the images. This difference motivated Diop to rescue many of these images forgotten in the archives. A patterned backdrop, Diop says, "drives the eye toward a central feature of the image, usually the hands and the face."[23] In addition, African photographers used the 'hero shot,' working at eye level or below their sitters making them seem larger than life and increasing their importance. They moved closer to their subjects and framed their images more tightly, whereas European photographers tended to shoot from a greater distance. By contrast in Figure 4, an image from the colonial photographer Pierre Tacher, the subject is shot from the top down, diminishing her importance. In addition, she is shot from a distance with her face, feet, and hand in the shadows, and there is no backdrop. [24]

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

As mentioned earlier, mid-century portrait photography in Senegal and the country within its borders, The Gambia, emerged in contrast to colonial images by filling the frame with intimacy and dignity. New props begin to appear in greater quantities: motorcycles, bicycles, and telephones. In the Senegalese portraitist Mama Casset's images, we see a pen, a telephone, and a notebook (Figure 5). The proliferation of props in portrait photography, which Buckley (2000) also notes in The Gambia, draws on the idea of layering to create an identity, a concept which

comes from the world adornment and its link to tailoring. These props point to the *jamano*, a Wolof word that translates as "the era or fashion of the times" (Buckley 2000, 76). In sharp contrast to colonial era photography that sought to capture social types, the use of props in African portrait photography allowed photographers and their clients to play with multiple identities.[25] As Jean Borgatti argues with respect to the photography of Seydou Keita and Philip Apagya, the photographer performed a social role in coaxing out the performance of the sitter aided by props to narrativize her or his own story (Borgatti 2013, 328). Candace Keller mentions how, aided by Seydou Keita's studio props, young men displayed *fadenya* characteristics, of individuality and fortitude by dressing as boxers, cowboys, and dandies (Keller 2013, 371). In Dakar, this trend of prop-heavy portrait photography continued into the 1980s and 1990s when technological shifts in cameras and film developing moved the practice out of the studios and into homes (Buggenhagen 2014).

[FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE]

Diop plays fast and footloose with these histories of props in Western and African portrait photography. Although Diop says, "I borrowed codes from this West African studio photography tradition,"[26] his images are not prop heavy. He recreates original scenes by swapping rather than adding objects. Diop explains, "For me the use of props is tricky because it can definitely add value to whatever you want to express in the picture, but it can also overshadow the core message of the picture."[27] He also departs from the convention of using props to represent a period. Instead, he uses props to tie together a series of images across periods; "for *Diaspora*, the main reason was that I wanted something that would be a thread between the pictures because each of them is inspired by a body of a piece of art that was painted

or photographed in a different century by different artists with different influences, so how do you bind this whole series together? It is by creating this thing that comes over and over."[28]

Diop also differs in his use of props to index a sitter's social status. For example, he replaces the chess pieces in Albert Badin with a red card and a whistle (Figure 6). The chess piece, a pawn, suggests liberation while the red card suggests penalty. Red penalty cards are raised to indicate that a player has broken the rules and will be removed from the game. Diop uses these objects, I argue, to disrupt the narrative of migration as an upward trajectory. He reverses the penalty Europe imposes on its clandestine migrants by depicting his sitter holding a red card in response to European racism. Of these props Diop says, "I wanted to draw a comparison between these early forced migrants and migrants today, because their destinies are quite similar, it is just the stakes that are different. The so-called levels of freedom are different too, but it is sort of the same paradox, you are respected but you are not so respected, you are influential but you don't belong, you are adored, but at the same time, rejected."[29]

[FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE]

Omar Victor Diop's Skillful Footwork in *Citizen Belley* and *Ikhlas Khan*

Consider again *Portrait of Citizen Jean-Baptiste Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies, 1797,* painted by French artist Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson (1767–1824) (see figure 1). Girodet shows the sitter in three-quarters view. Belley leans on his right side against a bust of abolitionist Guillaume-Thomas Raynal. He gazes to the left toward heaven against a background of the sky and the landscape marked by hills in the distance. The viewpoint is from slightly below the figure and this combined with the upward view enhances Belley's importance.

In his photographic reenactment Diop repeats the upward gaze and the background of the sky, but not the hills in the distance. He uses a backdrop that flattens the image and replaces the bust of Raynal with an unmarked blue and white football on a beige platform. Belley is the football player and the football player is Belley, simultaneously revered and denigrated. In this image and many others in *Diaspora*, Diop swaps one object of veneration for another: here a bust of an abolitionist for a football. Raynal's presence and replacement suggests the replacement of liberal ideology with neoliberal ideology.

Consider now Diop's portrait of Ikhlas Khan, an African in India in the seventeenth century.[30] In the original portrait, the figure carries a sword in one hand and foliage in the other (Figure 7, left). The figure is shown in profile, and his gaze looks left. Portraits created prior to the fifteenth century (and some after, such as the image of Khan) lacked perspective; artists depicted persons on a flat background with little space between the person and the background. In Diop's reenactment, the perspective of the camera is lower, enlarging the sitter's figure, which is in three quarters view (Figure 7, right). The sitter's gaze is upward and to the left. Diop frames the image tightly. Diop does not place the shoe on the foot where it belongs but foregrounds it: in the uplifted hands of the sitter rests a single sneaker.

[FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE]

Diop's use of aesthetics from advertising and technology render *Ikhlas Khan* more like an advertisement than a work of fine art. These developments include large-scale, high-resolution images, rich colors, and flat design. With flat design, Diop conveys meaning with minimal visual cues. He says, "there is not much depth of field in my pictures even when it is fashion photography. I tend to flatten things out because I see the elements of the décor as items that have as much importance as the subject."[31] In *Khan*, Diop removes the beveling, the gold

embellishment, and rich layers of the original. He flattens the edges. In some *Diaspora* images Diop uses a light to the right to cast a slight shadow on the sitter; in *Khan* there is no shadow further reducing the effect of depth. The lack of perspective, the reduction of the effect of depth, and lack of three-dimensionality emphasize the *singularity* of his message about migration: dignity can be lost and won like a football match. Persons can be traded from team to team or have their humanity denied at the border.

Some props work together in predictable ways—domestic objects for example, like curtains, vases of flowers, and chairs—are all marks of social position. Therefore, they are effective props in portraiture. These "bright objects" (Bryant 2014, 202), pull other entities along their path in space and time. For example, European shoes often appeared in mid-century studio photography across West Africa and pointed to the hope that the wearers were going somewhere in life. Objects like shoes create paths but also retrace well-worn paths of migration. The sneakers in the *Diaspora* series are "bright objects," (Bryant 2014) leading athletes to a better life in Europe. However, any bright object can become a "rogue object." These objects wander in and out of the frame reconfiguring gravitational relations. A sneaker placed in an advertisement exerts a powerful pull, making objects, and the desire for them underpin migration in ways that are underappreciated. No doubt many young people leave Senegal to provide footballs and sneakers for their siblings, but also to acquire cloth and cash for homebuilding and to constitute marriages.

If You Were in My Sneakers…

Social relations are constituted through the exchange of objects, such as woven wrappers for babies or funeral shrouds for the dead (Buggenhagen 2012). Overseas migrants work to provide these forms of value for those at home. As Fatou Diome so hauntingly describes,

"they're prepared to cross the Sahel on foot, die in the hold of a plane or on a raft launched on the slaughter-water from the Strait of Gibraltar. People die alone on the way, but often for the sake of others" (Diome 2006, 171).

These days, sports—such as basketball or football—provide avenues for an elite few young men and women to reach Europe and North America. As Diop has said,

> Soccer is an interesting global phenomenon that for me often reveals where society is in terms of race. When you look at the way that the African soccer royalty is perceived in Europe, there is a very interesting blend of glory, hero-worship and exclusion. Every so often, you get racist chants or banana skins thrown on the pitch and the whole illusion of integration is shattered in the most brutal way. It's that kind of paradox I am investigating in the work. (Diop quoted in O'Hagan 2015).

As he points out, although football provides one of the few legal means of entry into Europe for African athletes, that entry is fraught with racism. In *Diaspora*, football gear is used to argue that migration is at once a path to dignity but the very means through which that dignity can be bought and sold.

I began this essay by asking, if one of the defining images of the present is the unregulated migration of individuals and families across the Mediterranean in small boats, what does migration look like from the perspective on those based on the African continent? In this essay, I have argued that Diop focuses his lens on the dignity of migrants, rather than the crisis of migration. By reframing contemporary migration in a global historical context, Diop shows the contradictions of these movements across oceanic spaces. As much as Diop's reenactment of *Jean-Baptiste Belly* shows the contradictions of revolutionary France, his reenactments of other portraits in the *Diaspora* series show the contradictions of contemporary migration. Viewing

these migratory processes through the lens of photography reveals the dissonance between the materiality of labor and the aspirations of a global life. This is true not only for ordinary migrants but for professional athletes of African descent playing for European teams and important historical figures of African descent experience European all of whom face exclusionary practices and policies abroad. Diop's placement of football paraphernalia across this series not only provides striking imagery, but attracts viewers' attention and places Africa in a contemporary context rife with racism and exclusion. He reminds us that, in a time of unprecedented migration to Europe, the residues of Europe's past relationship to the colonized world remain. Diop's *Diaspora* thus offers a window into African journeys abroad throughout history and creates an opening for exploring African futures.

Acknowledgments

Support for this research was provided by the Institute for Advanced Study, a Curatorial Fellowship at the Mathers Museum of World Cultures, the College Arts and Humanities Institute Travel Grant, and a New Frontiers in the Arts and Humanities Fellowship at Indiana University. I would also like to thank the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archive, and the National Archives of Senegal for use of and access to their collections. I thank Joanna Grabski and Patricia Hickling for reading early drafts along with the panel participants at the Dakar 2016 conference and the participants of an IAS workshop at IU organized by Eileen Julien and Suzanne Godby Ingalsbe. I would like to acknowledge the Scholarly Writing Program at IU and its Director, Laura Plummer. My thanks to the anonymous reviewers whose insightful comments have contributed to this paper.

References

Albahari, Maurizio. 2015. *Crimes of Peace. Mediterranean Migrations at the World's Deadliest Border.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Alloula, Malek. 1986. *The Colonial Harem*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Amkpa, Awam, Tamar Garb, and Walther Collection. 2013. *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive*. Gottingen: Steidel.

Bajorek, Jennifer. 2010a. "Of Jumbled Valises and Civil Society: Photography and the Political Imagination in Senegal." *History and Anthropology* 21(4):431-452.

2010b. Photography and National Memory: Senegal about 1960. *History of Photography* 34(2):158-169.

Bigham, Elizabeth. 1999. "Issues of Authorship in the Portrait Photographs of Seydou Keita." *African Arts* 32(1):56-67, 94-96.

Borgatti, Jean. 2013. "Likeness or Not: Musings on Portratiure in Canonical African Art and its Implications for African Portrait Photography." In *Portraiture and Photography in Africa,* edited by J. Peffer and E. Cameron, 315-340. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Bryant, Levi R. 2014. *Onto-Cartography: An Ontology of Machines and Media. Speculative Realism*. Edinburgh University Press.

Buckley, Liam. 2000. "Self and Accessory in Gambian Studio Photography." *Visual Anthropology Review* 16(2):71-91.

2005. "Objects of Love and Decay: Colonial Photographs in a Postcolonial Archive." *Cultural Anthropology* 20(2):249-270.

Buggenhagen, Beth. 2012. Muslim Families in Global Senegal. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

2014. "A Snapshot of Happiness: Photo Albums, Respectability, and Economic Uncertainty in Dakar." *Africa* 84 (1): 78-100.

Carter, Donald Martin. 3013. "Blackness Over Europe." In *Africa in Europe,* edited by Eve Rosenhaft and Robbie Aitken, 201-216. Liverpool University Press.

Comaroff, John L., and Jean Comaroff. 1990. "Goodly Beasts and Beastly Goods: Cattle and Commodities in a South African Context." *American Ethnologist* 17(2):195-216.

2011. *Theory from the South*. Routledge.

de Jong, Ferdinand, and Elizabeth Harney. 2015. "Art from the Archive." *African Arts* 48(2):1-4.

Dedieu, Jean-Philippe. 2014. "African Diasporas, Playing with the Past." In *New York Times*, Vol. December 5.

Diome, Fatou. 2006. *The Belly of the Atlantic*. The Serpent's Tail.

Edwards, Elizabeth. 2013. "Looking at Photographs: Between Contemplation, Curiosity, and Gaze." In *Distance and Desire. Encounters with the African Archive*, edited by Tamar Garb, 48-54. Gottingen: Steidle.

Enwezor, Okwui. 2010. "Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social Identity. A Conceptual Framework." In *Events of the Self. Portraiture and Social Identity. Contemporary African Photography from the Walther Collection*, edited by Okwui Enwezor, 23-28: Steidl.

Faris, James C. 1996. *Navajo and Photography: A Critical History of the Representation of an American People*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Geary, Christraud. 2003. "Photographic Trade: Portraits into Postcards." In *At First Sight: Photography and the Smithsonian*, edited by M.A. Foresta, 44-47. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian.

Geary, Christraud and Virginia-Lee Webb. 1998. *Delivering Views: Distant Cultures in Early Postcards*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian.

Gore, Charles. 2015. "African Photography." *African Arts* 48(3):1-5.

Grabski, Joanna. 2011. "Market Logics: How Locality and Mobility Make Artistic Livelihoods in Dakar." *Social Dynamics* 37(3):321-331.

2015. "Regarding Artists, the City, and the Global Art World." *African Arts* 48(2):9-10.

Guyer, Jane I. 2004. *Marginal Gains: Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Haney, Erin. 2010. *Photography and Africa*. London: Reaktion Books.

Hannaford, Dinah. 2016. "Intimate Remittances: Marriage, Migration, and Moneygram in Senegal." *Africa Today* 62(3):92-109.

Jean-Hubert, Mark Francis and Ma Aline Luque. *1989. Magiciennes de la terre.* Editions du Centre Pompidou; First Edition.

Keller, Candace. 2013. "Visual Griots: Identity, Aesthetics, and the Social Roles of Portrait Photographers in Mali." In *Portraiture and Photography in Africa,* edited by John Peffer and Elizabeth L. Cameron, 363-406. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Kratz, Corrine. 2001. *The Ones That Are Wanted*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kringelbach, Helene Neveu. 2016. Immigration Policy and Transnational Polygyny bewtween Senegal and France. In *Affective Circuits: African Migrations to Europe and the Pursuit of Social Regeneration*, edited by Jennifer Cole and Christian Groes, 146-168. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Landau, Paul Stuart, and Deborah D. Kaspin, eds. 2002. *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

MacDougall, David. 2006. *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Makhulu, Anne-Maria, Beth Buggenhagen, and Stephen Jackson, eds. 2010. *Hard Work, Hard Times: Global Volatility and African Subjectivities.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Mazzarella, Wiliam. 2009. "Affect: What is it Good For?" In *Enchantmets of Modernity: Empire, Nation, Globalization*, edited by S. Dube, 291-309. London: Routledge.

Mbaye, Linguere Mously. 2014. "Barcelona or die: Understanding Illegal Migration from Senegal."*IZA Journal of Migration* 3:21.

Mbembe, Achille. "Theory From the Antipodes: Notes on Jean & John Comaroffs' TFS." Theorizing the Contemporary, *Cultural Anthropology* website, February 25, 2012. https://culanth.org/fieldsights/272-theory-from-the-antipodes-notes-on-jean-john-comaroffs-tfs

Mbow, P. and M. Tamba. 2007. "L'emigration clandestine. Le profil des candidats." Mouvement Citoyen-Embassy of Netherland in Senegal, CARITAS-Fondation Konrad Adenauer-Stifung. Dakar: Senegal.

Merrill, Heather. 2015. "In Other Wor(l)ds: Situated Intersectionality in Italy." In *Geographies of Justice and Social Transformation: Spaces of Danger: Culture and Power in the Everyday,* edited by Heather Merrill and Lisa Hoffman, 77-100. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.

Mofokeng, S. Machabe. 2013. *Black Photo Album, Look at Me: 1890-1950*. Steidl.

Niang, Mame-Diarra. 2014. Dak'Art 14. "These Landscapes are Extremely Contemporary." *Contemporary And*. http://www.contemporaryand.com/magazines/these-landscapes-are-extremely-contemporary/. Accessed 12/19/2016.

Nimis, Erika. 2005. *Photographes d'Afrique de l'Ouest: l'expérience yoruba*. Paris, Ibadan: Karthala IFRA.

Njami, Simon, ed. 2010. *Samuel Fosso*. Paris: Revue noire.

Nzewi, Ugochukwu-Smooth C. 2015. "In the Long Shadows of Euro-America, or, What is Global Contemporary?" *African Arts* 48(2):10-11.

O'Hagan, Sean. 2015. Omar Victor Diop: "'I want to reinvent the heritage of African studio photography'." In *The Guardian*, July 11. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/jul/11/mar-ictor-ioi-want-to-reinvent-great-heritage-of-african-studio-photography, accessed 7/27/2016.

Ouédraogo, Jean-Bernard. 2002. *Arts photographiques en Afrique: technique et esthétique dans la photographie de studio au Burkina Faso*. Paris: Harmattan.

Peffer, John. 2013. "Introduction. The Study of Photographic Portraiture in Africa." In *Portraiture and Photography in Africa,* edited by John Peffer and Elizabeth Cameron, 1-34. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Pinney, Christopher. 1992. "The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and Photography." In *Anthropology and Photography*, edited by Elizabeth Edwards, 74-95. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

1997. *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pinney, Christopher, and Nicolas Peterson, ed. 2003. *Photography's Other Histories*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Poole, Deborah. 2005. "An Excess of Description: Ethnography, Race, and Visual Technologies." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34(1):159-179.

Rabine, Leslie. 2010. "Fashionable Photography in Mid-Twentieth Century Senegal." *Fashion Theory* 14(3):305-330.

Roberts, Allen F., et al. 2003. *A Saint in the City : Sufi Arts of Urban Senegal.* Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History.

Rutherford, Danilyn. 2016. "Affect Theory and the Empirical." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45:285-300.

Ryan, James R. 1997. *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sanyal, Sunanda K. 2015. "'Global': A View from the Margin." *African Arts* 48(1):1-4.

Shipley, Jesse. 2015. "Selfie Love: Public Lives in an Era of Celebrity Pleasure, Violence, and Social Media." *American Anthropologist* 117(2):403-413.

---

[1] See for example, "Reuters Wins Pulitzer for Photography of Migrant Crisis," http://www.reuters.com/news/picture/reuters-wins-pulitzer-for-photography-of?articleId=USRTX2AJBF, accessed on 7/7/2016.

[2] For a detailed discussion of the limitations and problematics of the use of "crisis" in the scholarship of the African continent see Makhulu et al. (2010).

[3] Diop, interviewed by the author, Bloomington, IN 9/2016.

[4] There are other similar photography projects using props to speak to actual and imaged journeys, see for example "Afronauts," http://www.lademiddel.com/the-afronauts-1.html, accessed on 12/19/2016.

[5] See Heather Merrill (2015, 84) for a discussion of the Italian footballer of African descent, Mario Balotelli.

[6] "Omar Victor Diop: The Newbie Photographer who went Pro." Nick Parker and Daisy Carrington, CNN, 8/5/2015, http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/05/arts/omar-victor-diop-photography-career/, accessed 7/13/2016.

[7] In 2015 the prices for Diop's work rose 30-40%, depending on size and edition number, roughly $6,000 to $13,000. The Telegraph, Colin Gleadell, 10/13/15. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/luxury/art/87310/art-sales-african-riches.html, accessed on 10/27/2015.

[8] Diop, interviewed by author, Dakar, 5/2014.

[9] Tigo and Orange are cellular networks operating in Dakar.

[10] Self Portrait Project Series, http://nomusa.makhubu.free.fr/page13/page10/page10.html, accessed on 6/2/2015.

[11] Shown at the Walther Collection Project Space, New York City, *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive*.

[12] Diop, interviewed by the author, Bloomington, IN 9/2016.

[13] http://kehindewiley.com/about/, accessed 11/3/2016.

[14] Neelika Jayawardane, AIAC, 2012, http://africasacountry.com/2012/11/the-end-of-the-colonial-gaze/, accessed 9/9/2015.

[15] Nomusa Makhumu, Self Portrait Project Series, http://nomusa.makhubu.free.fr/page13/page10/page10.html, accessed on 6/2/2015.

[16] In East Africa modernist props were used before the 1950s, see for example Kratz (2001).

[17] Although there was a fire in Casset's studio that destroyed a large part of his archive, enough images were remaining for Bouna Medoune Seye to mount an exhibition for Dakar Mois de Photo in 1990.

[18] Cedric Nunn, interviewed by the author, Bloomington, IN 9/5/2013 and Santu Mofekeng, interviewed by the author, Bloomington, IN 10/30/13.

[19] Djibril Sy, interviewed by the author, Dakar, 12/2011.

[20] Diop, interviewed by the author, Bloomington, IN 9/5/2016.

[21] Diop, interviewed by the author, Bloomington, IN 9/5/2016.

[22] Benyoumoff could have been the name of an editor, a photographer, or a publisher (Geary 2003, 45), and may have employed apprentice photographers who were African. Benyoumoff is likely a Lebanese surname (Ibrahima Thiam, interviewed by the author, Dakar, 6/2016)

[23] Diop, interviewed by the author, Bloomington, IN, 9/5/2016.

[24] Photographer Ibrahima Thiam, interviewed by the author, Dakar, 6/2016.

[25] Similar examples can be found in the case of photography in India, see Pinney (1997).

[26] Diop, interviewed by author, Bloomington, IN 9/5/2016.

[27] Diop, interviewed by the author, Bloomington, IN 9/5/2016.

[28] Diop, interviewed by the author, Bloomington, IN 9/5/2016.

[29] Diop, interviewed by the author, Bloomington, IN 9/5/2016.

[30] Africans arrived in India as early as the seventh century as sailors on Arab merchant ships, in the thirteenth century as soldiers in Muslim armies, and during the colonial era as domestic servants and slaves transported by Portuguese, French, and British colonizers.

[31] Diop, interviewed by the author, Bloomington, IN, 9/5/2016.